

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

June 29, 2006

**SEA LAB IMPROVEMENTS AND EDUCATION
PLAN DEVELOPMENT**

File No. 05-098

Project Manager: David Hayes

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse an amount not to exceed \$100,000 to the Los Angeles Conservation Corps to upgrade its Sea Lab environmental marine and animal husbandry laboratory and education facilities, relocate and expand Sea Lab's native plant nursery, and to plan and develop the Environmental Careers Opportunities Program (ECO).

LOCATION: Redondo Beach harbor area, City of Redondo Beach- Harbor Area, Los Angeles County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Education and Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location

Exhibit 2: Redondo Beach Harbor

Exhibit 3: Sea Lab Site Plan

Exhibit 4: Letters of Support

Exhibit 5: CEQA Notice of Exemption

Exhibit 6: Photographs

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31000 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$100,000 to the Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC), to upgrade environmental marine, animal husbandry laboratory and education facilities; to construct an upgraded native plant nursery; and to plan and develop an Environmental Careers Opportunities program to utilize these facilities, as described in the accompanying staff recommendation. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds for construction, the LACC shall submit for review and approval by the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
 - a. Evidence that the LACC has obtained all necessary permits and approvals.
 - b. A final work plan (including names of any contractors to be used in the completion of the project), a project schedule, and budget.
2. LACC shall install and maintain sign(s) acknowledging Conservancy funding participation on the project site, the design, number, and placement location of which have been approved by the Executive Officer.
3. LACC shall enter into an agreement, satisfactory to the Executive Officer of the Conservancy, and sufficient to protect the public interest in improvements constructed with these funds.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapters 3 and 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. Los Angeles Conservation Corps is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501 (c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff is recommending that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$100,000 to the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, to upgrade its environmental, marine, and animal husbandry laboratory and education facilities; to construct an upgraded native plant nursery; and for planning and development of the proposed Environmental Careers Opportunities Program (ECO) that would use these facilities, which are located at the Conservation Corps’ Sea Lab site in the Redondo Beach Harbor area.

The Sea Lab was founded in 1995 and is operated as a program of the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, a 501(c) (3) nonprofit corporation providing employment training and environmental education to inner city youth of Los Angeles. The Sea Lab facility provides primary care to marine organisms that are recovered from southland power plant intake systems and are housed onsite. Additionally, the Sea Lab facility grows 30,000 native plants annually, plants hundreds of trees and works on a variety of habitat restoration projects throughout the Los Angeles region. The Sea Lab serves 4th through 12th grade students from the South Santa Monica Bay and inland Los Angeles area as a wetland, marine habitat, watershed and pollution prevention-learning center, and also provides internships to young adults (ages 18-24) from urban environments who have expressed an interest in the conservation or education fields.

The proposed project would upgrade and expand these facilities and uses. If approved, Conservancy funds will be used for three components: 1.) Expansion of the native plant facility for native plant propagation; 2.) Installation of a prefabricated structure to upgrade a wet lab for animal husbandry, and 3.) Planning and development of a new Environmental Careers Opportunities (ECO) Program.

1. Native Plant Propagation: LA Conservation Corps' Sea Lab native plant nursery is experiencing an increase in demand that exceeds the capacity of the current 300-square foot nursery. Additionally, the facility does not have appropriate drainage and its wood planting structures are beginning to fail. Conservancy funds would be used to relocate water, electricity, and a tool storage area within the upgraded propagation structure and would increase the Corps' capacity to grow native plants for habitat restoration projects, particularly for coastal areas. The Sea Lab facility will supply native plant for several Conservancy projects, including Ballona Wetlands Restoration, and would further the restoration of coastal bluff habitat in the Los Angeles region.

2. Marine Laboratory and Animal Husbandry Facility: Conservancy funds would be used to purchase a prefabricated single story building that will house Sea Lab's marine wet tank and animal husbandry laboratory learning center. This structure will replace a deteriorating former utility work shed now being used for that purpose. The existing shed has limited utility as a teaching laboratory facility due to its condition. The proposed new building will be a material facility upgrade, by providing better use of space, room for multiple users, an animal husbandry lab with more appropriate work surfaces and a storage room for professional equipment. These improvements will provide room for a greater number of animals and better control of pathogens in areas where animal foods are sorted and prepared. This structure will also be used as a wet tank teaching lab for visiting students and a demonstration facility open to the public.

3. Environmental Careers Opportunities Program: Finally, funds from the Coastal Conservancy would be used to plan and develop a new Environmental Careers Opportunities Program. SEA Lab provides internships to young adults from urban environments who have expressed an interest in the conservation or environmental education fields. These interns include students currently enrolled in middle and high school programs at either local public schools or at charter schools run by the Los Angeles Conservation Corps. These students become docents for Kindergarten thru 12th/ grade students touring the Sea Lab.

The new ECO program will build upon the Conservation Corps' existing training, facilities, and intern programs. The goal of the ECO program is to develop an environmental career certification program for 6th- thru 12th-grade students focusing on three career areas currently most in demand. The following internships will be developed: 1) **Research:** Participants completing this internship would receive a certification that they have obtained skills necessary to pursue a college major and/or become employed as a research technician in marine-related fields; 2) **Restoration:** Participants completing this internship would receive a certification that they have obtained skills necessary to pursue a college major in this field and/or become employed at a nursery or with businesses engaged in restoration activities; 3) **Education:** Participants completing this internship would receive academic credit applicable to their teaching credential at participating institutions. It is expected that participants could use their certifications in applying for scholarships, colleges, and employment opportunities.

Los Angeles Conservation Corps will provide \$26,000 of in-kind services by providing demolition and recycling of existing structures and construction assistance with the nursery. AES Redondo Beach, the property owner, will remove large defunct infrastructure elements that now occupy space within the exhibit area, contributing a \$25,000 value.

Site Description: Sea Lab is located on North Harbor Drive, easily accessible by public transportation and on a highly visible corner near the Redondo Beach Harbor. It is also sited along a popular spur segment of the California Coastal Trail. The Sea Lab facility is housed in a former generator and seawater cooling facility owned by AES Redondo Beach, a limited liability company operating under a long-term lease to the year 2026 (Exhibits 2 and 3). AES, which in turn leases space to LACC, supports the Sea Lab program and proposed expansion activities (see Exhibit 4, Support Letter from AES Redondo Beach).

Project History: Sea lab has been a participant in numerous Conservancy restoration projects, including parts of the Santa Monica Bay Restoration and most recently the Redondo Bluffs restoration project, completed in February, 2006 with Conservancy funding.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$100,000
Los Angeles Conservation Corps (in-kind)	26,600
AES Redondo Beach	<u>25,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$151,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds for the construction and improvement portions of the project is the Conservancy's fiscal year 2005 appropriation from the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal Beach Protection Fund of 2002 (Proposition 50). Proposition 50 requires that a portion of these funds be used for the development of facilities to promote public access and participation in the conservation of land, water and wildlife. Eligible projects include nature centers, like the proposed project, that are in or adjacent to watersheds and wetlands and provide viewing, outdoor experiences, and conservation education programs (California Water Code Section 79571). Funding priority is to be given to nature centers operated by or in cooperation with nonprofit organizations that are designed to serve children from urban areas who lack access to natural areas and outdoor education programs. Consistent with these requirements, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps's Sea Lab provides facilities for research and education, focusing on wetland and coastal watershed habitats, and pollution prevention.

The development of the Environmental Careers Opportunity Program would be funded from the California Beach and Coastal Enhancement Account in the Environmental License Plate Fund, which may be used for any purpose consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. This component of the project is consistent with Chapter 3 of Division 21, specifically section 31119, pertaining to education projects that relate to coastal resources.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapters 3 and 9 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, regarding kindergarden k-12th grade education projects and public access to the coast.

Section 31119(a)(1) within Chapter 3 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, enables the Conservancy to "undertake educational projects for pupils in kindergarden to grade 12, inclusive, relating to preservation, protection, enhancement and maintenance of coastal resources," and to "award grants to nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and public agencies for those purposes." The proposed project will expand and enhance the existing educational facilities and programs offered at the Sea Lab. The Sea Lab intertwines the subjects of habitat conservation and enhancement as well as pollution prevention activities to preserve and protect marine wildlife.

Chapter 9 of Division 21 (Public Resources Code 31400-31409) establishes the Conservancy's role in implementing a system of public accessways to and along the State's coastline (Section 31400). Through the proposed authorization, the Conservancy would play a role in providing an important public coastal access opportunity for public as well as grade school and high school students.

Pursuant to Section 31400.1, the Conservancy may award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations to develop, operate or manage lands for public access purposes to and along the coast. The proposed project would provide funding to the Los Angeles Conservation Corp's Sea Lab to improve and develop a facility that already provides coastal access and nature interpretation. Planning and development of the ECO Program will assist the Conservation Corps to better manage and operate the facility to achieve its educational goals. Consistent with 31400.1, the proposed project would provide Sea Lab with increased capacity to operate and maintain a visitor serving facility that meets greater than local needs. As is discussed in the "Project Summary" above, the Sea Lab serves school children from Los Angeles County and attracts coastal visitors from throughout the state.

Consistent with Section 31400.2, staff is recommending approval of this project after evaluating the amount of funding provided by Conservancy in light of the total amount of available funds for coastal education/interpretive centers, the fiscal resource of grantee, the urgency of the project, and the application of factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority (see "Consistency with Conservancy's Project Select Criteria & Guidelines" discussion below). Additionally, this project will help to meet the requirement under Proposition 50 to use ten percent of coastal watershed and wetland protection funds for the acquisition and development of facilities to promote public access to and participation in land, water, and wildlife resources conservation, as discussed in "Project Financing", above.

Section 31400.3 states that the Conservancy may assist public agencies in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the State's coastline. Consistent with

this goal, the Sea Lab is located along the primary accessway between Redondo Beach and Hermosa Beach, providing the public access through its educational programs as an added coastal attraction.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL (S) & OBJECTIVE (S):**

Consistent with Goal 2 Objective D of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project will increase coastal recreation opportunities for residents and visitors by enhancing the Sea Lab facilities as a regional environmental education center.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** Letters of support are attached as Exhibit 4.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located on Harbor Drive between Hermosa Beach and Redondo Beach Pier, near Redondo Beach Harbor, in the City of Redondo Beach, Los Angeles County.
5. **Need:** Funding from the Coastal Conservancy would provide essential facility upgrades that would improve Sea Lab's native plant propagation for regional habitat enhancement and restoration projects and upgrade its teaching lab animal husbandry facilities. The nursery upgrades will enhance the capacity of plant propagation and education/training programs. The wet animal currently uses a deteriorating former equipment shed, whose use as a teaching facility is limited. Conservancy funding would also develop an educational 'bridge' between the Conservation Corps' work/intern training programs and environmental careers employment and education. Planning for the Environmental Careers Opportunities Program (ECO) will be for students from the 6th/ thru 12th/ grades, to prepare interested students for other Conservation Corps activities.
5. **Greater-than-local interest:** As discussed in the "Project Financing" and "Consistency With Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above, the Sea Lab provides hands-on education programs for school children from throughout Los Angeles County. Sea Lab also attracts the general public as well due in part to its highly visible location.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** The Sea Lab Nursery facilities are urgently needed in order to accommodate native plant propagation for major habitat restoration projects in the Santa Monica Bay and Los Angeles area.
8. **Innovation:** This project is an excellent example of a multi-purpose project. Funding from the Conservancy would enable the development of Conservation Corp's Environmental Careers Opportunity Program. The infrastructure improvements (nursery and prefabricated structure for wet-lab) will directly support the ECO program. This program would establish a certified environmental career program that would provide career ladder for young adults (6th/ thru the 12th/ grade) from urban settings who have expressed an interest in working in conservation or environmental education fields. When implemented, the ECO program would use the native plant nursery, and its wet lab animal husbandry facility, which are also key infrastructure components to its existing public education and intern programs.
9. **Readiness:** If approved, the native plant nursery will start construction in July 2006. The marine tank and learning laboratory prefabricated structure would be ordered July 2006 and the environmental careers program development would begin soon after the initial convening of its certification panel.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project is consistent with the City of Redondo Beach Local Coastal Program as described in the City of Redondo Beach Coastal Plan under policy E. Recreational Policies: "1. "visitor serving facilities will be maintained and, where possible expanded, existing visitor serving and recreational facilities should be protected to maintain a variety of visitor-serving facilities", and "2. 'Lower-cost visitor-serving' and recreational facilities will be protected, encouraged, and where possible provided".

The Sea Lab facilities and programs are visitor serving and accessible to visitors of all incomes and ages. Sea Lab also provides recreational activities, marine and environmental education, conservation and pollution prevention learning and recreational opportunities to inland communities.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The City of Redondo Beach, acting as lead agency, has determined the proposed animal husbandry facility to be categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it involves the replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities with substantially the same size, purpose and capacity as existing facilities (14 California Code of Regulations Section 15302)(Exhibit 5). The nursery part of the project is exempt for the same reason, and also because it involves minor alteration of existing facilities and topographical features (14 California Code of Regulation Section 15301). Funding for development of the Environmental Careers Opportunities program is not a project for purposes of CEQA, as defined under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15626, because it has no

potential for resulting in any physical change in the environment. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the physical improvements to be funded upon approval of this recommendation by the Conservancy.